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## HISTORICAL FRAGMENTS

### SOME LIGHT ON TWO HISTORICAL HOAXES

We set our pen to this topic because of the evident need of informing our readers concerning a type of historical error that seems to be widely prevalent, and about which inquiries and requests are frequently sent to the Library. A few weeks since came a letter from distant Washington, asking how much would be paid for "what we consider a valuable paper"—the sheet in question being the issue of the Vicksburg *Daily Citizen* for July 2, 1863. With far greater frequency, however, do such letters come concerning the *Ulster County Gazette* of Kingston, New York, for January 4, 1800. This paper contained an account of the funeral of George Washington, printed in columns bordered with heavy black mourning lines. It is indeed a fact that there was a paper at Vicksburg known as the *Citizen* which in the scarcity of materials which prevailed during the famous siege of 1863 was published for a time by the resourceful editor on wall paper; and it is a further fact that at Kingston, New York, both before and after President Washington's death was published a paper known as the *Ulster County Gazette*. It is rarely, if ever, the fact, however, that the many people scattered over the country who think they possess veritable original issues of these two papers are correct in their supposition. So widely distributed are copies of the *Ulster County Gazette* of January 4, 1800, that had this obscure country weekly of six-score years ago enjoyed the circulation of a modern metropolitan daily there would still be cause for wonderment over the number of copies that have survived. The simple fact is, of course, that these copies are all spurious, none of them being over sixty or sixty-five years old, while many of them are less venerable by far than the first automobile or the crop of high-school graduates of this year, 1918.

The *Ulster County Gazette* was established in 1798 and continued publication until 1822. During this entire period its publisher was Samuel Freer and his son (the latter alone after the death of the father). The younger man died in 1840, and not until ten or

fifteen years later was the first reprint of the now famous paper made. Since then reprints have been numerous; over a score have been listed by the Library of Congress, but it is probable many more have been made.

The reader will doubtless be curious to know what motives inspire the reprinting of this and other old newspapers. Fundamentally the motive in all cases is a desire for profit from the transaction, although this is frequently obscured, doubtless, by another, the practically universal interest in old things possessed of familiar historical associations. Now it is a curious fact about newspapers that practically all of the enormous number currently produced are destroyed within a short time and but few people, relatively speaking, have ever seen a newspaper of any considerable age. Thus, only a few weeks ago the news item was carried all over Wisconsin that in tearing down a house at Appleton between the walls had been found an "ancient" paper, being an issue of the Lawrence College paper for the year 1879. Evidently the incident was regarded by those who are familiar with news values as worthy of widespread heralding, even in this time of climacteric stress over the mightiest warfare the world has ever witnessed. Because of this widespread interest in relics of the past, newspaper publishers and others from time to time reproduce an issue of some early paper—frequently one of their own, or it may be one dealing with some event of universal historical interest. Such an event would be preëminently the death and funeral of Washington. Particularly in 1876, when the celebration of the national centennial aroused widespread popular interest, would anything which seemed to pertain directly to the Father of his Country command a widespread appeal. This appeal was cleverly capitalized by one publisher of a spurious reprint of the *Ulster County Gazette* about the Centennial Year in a circular headed "The Oldest Paper! A relic of 1799. Death of Washington! Slavery in New York, etc." It offered, at the price of ten cents a copy, a reissue of Freer's paper concerning the death of Washington so like the original that were Freer himself still living he would be unable to detect the counterfeit. The reprint could "only be obtained from our authorized traveling agents," and would be placed on sale in all the cities of the country.

A tramp printer of Ethiopian persuasion turned the death of Washington to private account in slightly different fashion at

Decatur, Illinois, a dozen years ago. He canvassed the retail merchants of the town for quantity orders for the paper, which he proposed to reprint, holding out the inducement that they could win favor with their customers at slight expense to themselves by enclosing with each order of merchandise sold a copy of the *Ulster County Gazette* containing the account of the death of President Washington. The argument of the sable salesman was successful to such an extent, I have been informed, that several thousand copies of the paper were struck off in a back-room print shop in Decatur, Illinois, one hundred and seven years after Washington's death.

Both the paper and the printing of these modern reprints differ from the original, so that it is not difficult for an expert to detect the spurious issue. For the guidance of others who may be interested in this particular paper it will suffice to note that so far as known not a single original copy of the issue of January 4, 1800, is still in existence. A good illustration of the unreliability of family tradition and, consequently, of the care the scholar must employ in making use of information of this character is afforded by the fact that possessors of copies of the *Ulster County Gazette* commonly relate (and doubtless commonly believe) that their issue has been handed down in the family as a prized heirloom through a long period of time. A concrete illustration of this sort came to the writer's attention in Chicago some years ago. A negro offered to sell for twenty dollars a copy of the paper under discussion, accompanying the proffer with a moving tale of family illness which forced him thus to sacrifice an object which had been treasured in the family for generations.

Another well-known newspaper which seems to have undergone frequent reprinting is the *Vicksburg Daily Citizen* for July 2, 1863. Unlike the *Ulster County Gazette*, however, the counterfeiting of this paper seems wholly to have escaped the attention of librarians, at least to the extent that no comment concerning it has ever come to my attention. The story of the famous wall-paper edition of the *Citizen* is interesting enough to justify relating, entirely aside from our present interest in the reprint editions of it that have been put forth from time to time. At the time of the famous siege the *Citizen* was being published by J. M. Swords. In the extremity to which he was reduced through scarcity of supplies as the siege progressed

he had resort to a supply of wall paper for stock on which to print his daily sheet. Reasoning both from the probable circumstances of the case and from the copies of the paper in the Wisconsin Historical Library it seems improbable that Editor Swords' supply of wall paper was all of one pattern. Probably the sale of his paper affords the only instance in history where wall paper was purchased at high price without regard to its quality or pattern. I speak advisedly concerning the price, for in the issue of June 18 the editor explains that newsboys who sell his paper for fifty cents do so without authorization from him. "The price of our paper at the office is twenty-five cents," and those who object to the "extortion," of the newsboys are advised to purchase their papers from the editor direct. The copy before us of the sheet which thus commanded a price of fifty cents on the street consists of four columns seventeen inches in length, two of them being devoted to modern news and only two to local items. One of them relates that during the working off of the edition of two days before a thirteen-inch Yankee bombshell "made a dash" into the office. Passing through roof and floor it buried itself in the ground and there exploded, sending its fragments upward again, bulging up the floor, and filling the office with a suffocating stench of powder. The notice concludes with a sarcastic fling at the Yankees who have "no better sense than to throw bombshells at the printers while they are trying to circulate truth and intelligence among the people." That under such untoward conditions for the prosecution of intellectual endeavor the editor retained a sense of humor is indicated in another local item headed "Improvement." "At a great expense and with the most untiring labor," it relates, "we have succeeded in making our paper a pictorial sheet, to the great delight of our readers." Citizens are urged to save "these illustrated papers" until the close of the war when their beautiful designs can be used to ornament the walls of rooms.

The copy of Editor Swords' paper now before us was preserved in accordance with his advice but hardly in a way foreseen by him. It was sent to the State Historical Society from the "Yankee" camp in the rear of Vicksburg, June 26, 1863, by Lieutenant W. W. Day of the Eleventh Wisconsin Infantry. While on picket he had challenged a Texas soldier to meet him between the lines for a talk.

The Texan accepted the challenge and Rebel soldier and Yankee foe-man conversed for an hour in the no man's land before the grim fortress which Grant was so hotly besieging. The paper which Day procured from the Texan will long be treasured by our Society as an interesting memento of our great civil conflict.

Vicksburg surrendered July 4 and the incoming Yankees found the *Citizen* for July 2 still on the press. Stopping to add a valedictory footnote they ran it off, thus completing the production of a famous paper. The *Citizen* died as it had lived, in an atmosphere of banter. Commenting on the report that "the Yankee Generalissimo" had expressed an intention of celebrating the Fourth with a dinner in Vicksburg, the editor concluded: "Ulysses must get into the city before he dines in it. The way to cook a rabbit is 'first catch the rabbit,' &c." The Yankee valedictory, printed on the same page with the foregoing, began: "Two days bring about great changes. The banner of the Union flows [floats] over Vicksburg. Gen. Grant has 'caught the rabbit' \* \* \* The *Citizen* lives to see it. For the last time it appears on 'wall-paper.' No more will it eulogize the luxury of mule-meat and fricassed kitten—urge Southern warriors to such diet never more. This is the last wall-paper edition, and is, excepting this note, from the types as we found them. It will be valuable hereafter as a curiosity."

The Wisconsin Historical Library has five copies of this paper. Two of them are original copies, the other three are reprints. The original issues are printed on wall paper having a blue flower design on light tan background. Of the three reprints one was gotten out by a patent medicine firm in Chicago in the later eighties. It does not profess to be other than a reprint, and in place of the wall-paper background of the original the reverse side of this sheet is covered with testimonials from grateful patients. Parenthetically it may be added that one of these affords the most interesting item of the entire sheet, being given by one "William R. Harper, Professor of Hebrew, Yale College." The two remaining reprints are on wall paper, the figure differing in each case and also from that of the original issue. Obviously intended to pass muster for the original, any competent newspaper librarian would detect the fraud upon cursory inspection. How many reprint editions of this paper aside from the three before

us have been made, and whether the work will go on until issues of the *Vicksburg Citizen* become as widely diffused as those of the *Ulster County Gazette* are interesting questions. Enough has been said to enlighten the reader concerning the general situation with respect to these two papers, and to discourage the entertainment of undue expectations concerning the historical interest or financial value which attaches to any copy of them he may happen to possess.

M. M. QUAIFFE.

## TWO EARLY ELECTRIC PLANTS IN WISCONSIN

Because of its unique topography Wisconsin possesses an abundant supply of water power which makes it rank high among the states in the possession of that resource. A wide, flat highland, varying in height from 1,900 feet in the eastern part to 1,000 feet in the western, crosses the northern part of the state, and from it the rivers descend in every direction except eastward. Because Lakes Superior and Michigan bound the state on the north and east and the Mississippi River on the west and southwest, all rivers must find a low trough at a short distance from their source into which to discharge. A rapid fall and large water powers are the result.<sup>1</sup>

The importance of water power in a state with no coal supply is enormous. The need and opportunity for the development of this resource were early realized, and Wisconsin soon became the field for the operations of electrical engineers. J. N. Cadby, a consulting engineer, of Madison, has kindly furnished from his correspondence the data for the following descriptions of two of the earliest electric plants in the state, one in Appleton, the other in Burkhardt.

The first commercial electric lighting plant in the United States was, so far as is known, the Appleton Edison Light Company, which began operations August 20, 1882. It thus antedates by two weeks the New York Edison Electric Illuminating Company, started September 4 of the same year, which is generally regarded as the first of its kind. In the Appleton plant was installed a dynamo known as the K type, its capacity being 250 16-candlepower lamps, 120 volts D. C. As there were no meters with which to measure the current,

<sup>1</sup> Leonard S. Smith, *The Waterpowers of Wisconsin*, Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Bulletin, XX, 9.